

Talking Points for HLPF (5 minutes)

2022 HLPF theme: “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Good morning! It is good to be here with you, even virtually, as we open this year’s High Level Political Forum.

His Excellency Collen Vixen Kelapile, Her Excellency and my dear sister Amina Mohammed, Director General Qu Dongyu, His Excellency Suriya Chindawongse, Ms. Mari Pangestu, Professor Stern, my fellow SDG Advocate Valentina and distinguished guests.

Let us be clear, even before COVID-19, the world was off track on the Agenda 2030 promise to leave no one behind.

The world is wealthier than it’s ever been, yet alarmingly a huge increase in the number of child labourers – to a shocking 160 million children – happened during the first four years of the SDGs, before the pandemic. We have also seen an equally shocking increase in the number of children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade, by 10,000 a week!

And yes, both of these problems have gotten worse due to COVID-19.

And now, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are seeing millions of Ukrainian children at immediate risk and millions more children around the world at risk of starvation due to the catastrophic impact the war is having on the global food and fuel supply chains.

It is our most marginalised children who are most at risk. These are the same children who are forced to work, who are denied education, suffer the worst health outcomes, are malnourished, have little access to clean water and sanitation and remain trapped in the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Different SDGs but the same children.

During the pandemic, we disproportionately helped people and businesses in richer countries and left the most vulnerable to fend for themselves.

- Disgracefully just 0.13% of the \$12 trillion of G7's "global agenda for action" was allocated to low-income countries.
- The IMF's \$650 billion in Special Drawing Rights gave the equivalent of \$2000 per child to European countries and just \$60 per child to African countries.
- Furthermore, last year's historic global tax deal specifically excluded the extractive industry, allowing excessive profiteering in many African countries to continue.

What do these injustices from the last year have in common? Just one African country is in the G20, and none are in the G7, the IMF or the OECD. The international community's continued subjugation and discrimination of Africa must end.

Not only did the pandemic make a bad situation worse, the global response essentially ignored the problem.

There have been lots of challenges for those in education that we must address including the increased digital divide and recovering from the long school shutdowns, but as we gather here to discuss SDG 4, access to education must be central to the review. I have sat through too many meetings in the last few years where for-profit companies promote their narrow definitions of learning outcomes that basically promote the idea that only richer children should be taught by teachers and poorer children should teach themselves on devices they don't have. This is discrimination - children in poorer countries, children in Africa deserve teachers too.

Dear friends, this is on all of us.

If we do not address these issues in Africa, we cannot achieve SDG goals 4, 5 and 8.7 to name a few, let alone all the child related SDGs.

We are at a crucial point – either step up and get back on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda with a stronger resolve, or fail our children.

There are three specific solutions that could be agreed to at UNGA

1. For 70 years social protection has protected children in many countries from the economic extremes including child labour. Just \$53 billion - just over 1% of what richer countries spend on social protection - would provide benefits for every child and new mother living in a low-income country.
2. Ringfenced funding to solve the teacher crisis by expanding the number of professional teachers would make a tremendous difference to future global growth and be a much needed investment in the world's future. We have mechanisms like GPE and it could be funded by reallocating IMF Special Drawing Rights - we just need leadership.
3. School feeding programmes in every low and lower middle-income country as it is vital that poorer children receive basic nutrition at school. It makes a huge difference to a child's life chances, can be quick to set up and is affordable.

As I have said, we were off track prior to the pandemic and so I ask how long will we blame COVID-19 as the cause of these problems?

SDG Agenda 2030 is heading toward failure. To achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery we need to ensure no child is left behind. It is our individual and collective moral obligation.

We owe it to our children. We owe it to their present and their future.

Let me end with a story of hope that demonstrates the connections between SDG 4, 5 and 8.7. Tara was 8 years old when she was withdrawn from road cleaning and construction work in Rajasthan, India. Tara, now 17 years old, is in college and hopes to join the police force. If this was all of Tara's story, it would be inspirational enough, but there's more. Tara is a first-generation learner from the Banjara community, a nomadic community in Rajasthan. Tara is not just the first girl, but the first child in her community to complete her schooling and pursue higher secondary education. She even prevented her younger sister's child marriage and convinced her family to send her sister to school. She has been an active member in her community spreading awareness on the issues of child labour, trafficking and child marriage. Tara has enrolled more than 22 children from two other Banjara communities in school. With her on-going efforts in her community, there is no child labour or child marriage in her village today.

This is the promise and the impact of a life transformed, of a girl whose wings are set free. This is the promise of Agenda 2030 that we all committed to in 2015, we must make this a reality for all our children.

Thank you.